

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY  
OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES

August 2, 2021

To all Local Spiritual Assemblies

Dearly loved Friends,

Inspired by the approach of the Centenary of the Passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá—bringing with it the 100th anniversary of the opening of the Faith's Formative Age—we feel moved to make a special appeal to you, members of those institutions constituting, in the words of Shoghi Effendi, the beloved Guardian of the Cause, “the broad and indestructible foundation of the rising Order” of Bahá'u'lláh. What we ask is simply this: that in the months ahead, you devote yourselves as never before to advancing the growth of our Faith in this country, doing everything in your power to make a contribution toward the fulfillment of our “Call to Action,” published on June 3.

Throughout the course of the most recent series of Plans devised by the Universal House of Justice, we have seen in the most advanced clusters Local Spiritual Assemblies increasingly demonstrating their unique and irreplaceable role in fostering the emergence of a new social reality founded on spiritual principles. Nowhere are these developments more memorably described than in the House of Justice's message to the conference of the Continental Boards of Counselors gathered in the Holy Land on December 28, 2010. In the span of a few paragraphs, the Supreme Body describes their trajectory in terms similar to all other aspects of growth; namely, as part of a process of capacity building. That passage is well worth careful study, and it is our intent here to relate certain aspects of that guidance to our recent Call to Action.

Not surprisingly, the first issue raised by the House of Justice is the fundamental need for individual members of Assemblies to be closely involved in the work of the Plan:

Individual awareness of the process of growth gathering momentum . . . born of each member's personal involvement in the core activities, must coalesce into a collective consciousness that recognizes both the nature of the transformation under way and the obligation of the Assembly to foster it.

It is clear from the above passage that your individual services are essential to the effectiveness of the institution as a whole. The insights you garner from such service are brought to bear in addressing a range of issues, such as those described further on in that same message:

[I]t should not prove difficult for the Local Assembly to begin . . . with encouragement from an assistant to an Auxiliary Board member, to consult as a body on one or two specific issues with immediate relevance to the life of the community: how the devotional character of the village is being enhanced through the efforts of individuals who have completed the first institute course; how the spiritual education of the children is being addressed by teachers raised up by the institute; how the potential of junior youth is being realized by the programme for their spiritual empowerment; how the spiritual and social fabric of the community is being strengthened as the friends visit one another in their homes. As the Assembly consults on such tangible matters and learns to nurture the process of growth lovingly and patiently, its relationship with the Area Teaching Committee and the training institute gradually becomes cemented in a common purpose.

Among the new realities described in this passage is the emergence of institutions that most of you are now collaborating with. Far from causing a diminution in the importance of an Assembly, an ever-strengthening relationship with such cluster agencies as the Area Teaching Committee and the training institute—augmenting longstanding and ever-closer collaborations with Auxiliary Board members and their assistants—are extending its scope and influence. Further, Assemblies have a unique role to play in creating an atmosphere of universal participation and loving encouragement:

No less vital is [the Assembly's] ability to nurture an environment conducive to the participation of large numbers in unified action and to ensure that their energies and talents contribute towards progress. In all these respects, the spiritual well-being of the community remains uppermost in the Assembly's mind. And when inevitable problems arise, whether in relation to some activity or among individuals, they will be addressed by a Local Spiritual Assembly which has so completely gained the confidence of the members of the community that all naturally turn to it for assistance.

As your communities steadily advance you will, in addition to fostering the work of those directly participating in the life of the community, be naturally drawn into issues pertaining to the larger society. Over time, your Assemblies will be recognized as voices of moral authority for entire populations:

As they increasingly manifest their latent capacities and powers, their members will come to be seen . . . as *"the trusted ones of the Merciful among men."* Thus will these Assemblies become *"shining lamps and heavenly gardens, from which the fragrances of holiness are diffused over all regions, and the lights of knowledge are shed abroad over all created things. From them the spirit of life streameth in every direction."*

In sum, the House of Justice sets the expectation that clusters experiencing steady advancement and manifesting the movement of populations towards Bahá'u'lláh provide arenas in which Local Spiritual Assemblies will assume to an unprecedented degree the spiritual powers, moral influence, and capabilities for service to humanity envisioned for them by the Blessed Beauty.

With these thoughts in mind, we ask that you together take counsel on your role in assisting the friends to respond to our Call to Action with enthusiasm and unity of purpose. The critical needs of the moment are to accelerate and refine our teaching efforts, to mobilize believers of all backgrounds, and to foster a spirit of unity and spiritual vibrancy in the life of our communities. In a recent letter to the Regional Bahá'í Councils and Regional Training Institutes, we asked that they especially be mindful of the need to collaborate with you on these fronts. You will likewise want to collaborate closely with your Auxiliary Board members and cluster agencies. This is vital in view of the House of Justice's encouragement of that "uniquely affectionate and genuinely supportive relationship, described by the beloved Guardian in many of his messages, which Local Spiritual Assemblies should establish with the individual believer." Among all the Faith's institutions, it is local Assemblies that have unequalled familiarity with and access to the believers. As such, you are positioned to make a decisive contribution to fostering their wholehearted participation in service and, with

regard to young people, assist them in navigating the forces at work in the larger society, ensuring they stay oriented toward the principles and spirit of the Faith.

We ask that you consider the following:

- How can the members of your Assembly achieve still-higher levels of service to the Plan, working shoulder to shoulder with others?
- In what other ways can the Assembly help to ensure that the believers are actively engaged in the work of the Plan, especially African Americans, Indigenous friends, and believers from other backgrounds whose services are essential in reaching out to those populations in the larger society? How can it assist these friends and the rest of the believers in their outreach efforts?
- How can Assemblies help to foster an atmosphere that welcomes the insights, talents and contributions of members of these same populations? How would this aspiration enhance the consultation at Feast? The kinds of devotional gatherings that are held? The patterns of social life? Engagement with the larger community?
- What is your Assembly learning about the importance of the Plans' framework for action in the areas of expansion and consolidation, social action, and engagement in discourse with the larger society as the means for fulfilling our special mission in this country to eradicate the forces of materialism, moral corruption, and—the most vital and challenging issue—racial prejudice? How are you studying and applying the House of Justice's recent guidance on this matter, such as its message of July 22, 2020?
- How can you encourage a wide range of teaching activity in your community, including individual efforts such as firesides? What can your Assembly do to ensure that these aims are wisely promoted, evaluated, and refined, helping to promote steady progress? How can you also help to ensure that no undue obstacles are placed in the path of seekers wishing to enroll in the Faith?
- How can your Assembly approach all of these questions in a systematic manner and in an attitude of learning?

During this special year commemorating the passing of our beloved Master from this earthly life, we will without a doubt do all we can to advance the aims of the current Plan as an expression of our gratitude and love for the blessings He showered on our national community. In one of the letters written on behalf of the Guardian we are reminded: "Until the public sees in the Bahá'í Community a true pattern, in action, of something better than it already has, it will not respond to the Faith in large numbers." It is this very pattern, dearest friends, that we are now engaged in building, as a beacon to and refuge for our increasingly bewildered and sorely disillusioned fellow citizens.

Be assured our warmest admiration, profound gratitude, and constant prayers on your behalf accompany your every effort to answer our Call.

With our deepest love,

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE  
BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES